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## Najib's visit transcends diplomatic relations, say analysts

KUALA LUMPUR: The just-concluded six-day visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to China transcended diplomatic relations to open a new socio-cultural relationship, say analysts.

Dr Azmi Hassan, a geostrategist at the Institute of GeoSpatial and Perdana School at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, said Malaysia-China relations were all-inclusive though many viewed it in terms of trade ties because China was the world's second largest economic power.

Relations between the two countries were special as the ties had been upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, whereby the association was no longer focused just on economic ties, he said.

"Although China has similar partnership arrangements with other countries, including several in Europe as well as Thailand and Indonesia, its relations with Malaysia are special because we emphasise cultural and social development and people to-people contacts, which are at a minimal level in the other relationships," he added.

He said that in the military aspect, for example, China was a country feared and seen as capable of imposing itself on others, but this pressure was hardly felt due to the cordial Malaysia-China relations that have provided for defence understanding to hold joint military exercises.

"This is among the distinctions in Malaysia-China relations, which have been forged based on mutual trust and respect for each other.

"We (Malaysia) were the first Asean country to establish diplomatic relations with China, indicating that we do not harbour any suspicion. This relationship must be nurtured," he told Bernama.

Najib described his China visit, from

May 28 to June 2, as "very successful" and expressed optimism that the bilateral relations could be even further strengthened, especially after Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang had hailed the ties as something special.

Prof Ahmad Martadha, dean of the College of Law, Government and International Studies at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), said the close ties with China should be nurtured as they could have a positive impact on Malaysians, such as in the tourism sector.

He said Chinese nationals liked to come to Malaysia because of the similarities with the Malaysian Chinese community in terms of culture, language and food while Malaysia's position as an Islamic country made it a choice destination for Muslims in China.

In 2013, some 1.7 million Chinese nationals visited Malaysia and the number is expected to rise to two million this year in view of 'Visit Malaysia Year 2014'.

However, tourism has been slightly hit by the disappearance on March 8 of a Kuala Lumpur-Beijing bound Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight, MH370, which carried a large number of Chinese nationals.

The incident resulted in the termination of a tourism road show in Beijing as a mark of respect for the feelings of the relatives of the Chinese passengers of MH370.

However, the positive response that emerged out of Najib's visit to China has prompted Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz to say that the road show could be resumed soon.

Meanwhile, the Social and Cultural Affairs Advisor to the Government, Tan

Sri Dr Rais Yatim, said Najib's visit to China gave a positive implication for the development of the Malay language at the international level.

"This is an ongoing commitment in recognising our national language through bilateral cooperation in research, publication of masterpieces, the establishment of studies and lexicography," he said.

During his China visit, Najib had opened an international conference on 'Malay Studies 2014: Malaysia-China Relations' and launched three books - 'Kamus China-Melayu Dewan' (the Dewan Chinese-Malay Dictionary), 'Kajian Bandingan Pantun Melayu dengan Nyanyian Rakyat Tiongkok' (A Comparative Study of Malay Poems and Chinese Folk Songs) and 'Eksplorasi Pengajian Melayu-China' (An Exploration of Malay-Chinese Studies).

Prof Datuk Mohamad Abu Bakar, a lecturer at the International Relations Department of Universiti Malaya, said he regarded Najib's China visit as a "time tunnel" to reminisce and strengthen the relations forged on May 31, 1974, by his father, Malaysia's second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

He said Malaysia and China had gained a lot from their 40-year relationship and the visit was necessary to ensure that the relations remained on track and were not easily dislodged by incidents such as the missing MAS flight.

The visit by Najib, he said, was also crucial to put China at ease so that Malaysia was not seen as another Southeast Asian country that favoured the United States of America following the emergence of such a perception after the visit of President Barack Obama here last April. - Bernama

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**Najib receives the 40th Commemorative stamps from Chinese premier Li Keqiang at the Great Hall of People in Beijing.**



**Najib shakes hands with Beijing Muslims after performing Friday prayer at the oldest mosque in China, the Niujie Mosque.**